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C O N F I D E N T I A L STOCKHOLM 000629

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TAGS: PREL PMIL PGOV KPAO AF SW
SUBJECT: SWEDISH DEFENSE MINISTER ON AFGHANISTAN: "PLEASE
DO NOT EXCLUDE YOUR PARTNERS"

REF: A. STOCKHOLM 478
 ¶B. STOCKHOLM 440

Classified By: Amb. Matthew Barzun, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In his October 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Swedish Defense Minister Tolgfors spoke primarily about Afghanistan. Highlights included:

-- Security in Sweden's PRT was good during the elections but is declining overall. Swedish troops are patrolling more aggressively as a result. Sixty more troops will be deployed by the end of the year, taking the total to 500.

-- Swedish aid to Afghanistan is up, reaching approximately \$170 million for the next three years. The MOD is pushing for more civilian resources in the interagency, but Tolgfors himself is keeping a low profile on the issue to avoid highlighting the "imbalance" between military and civilian resources.

-- Support for the Afghanistan deployment is low among members of the largest opposition party. Tolgfors is doing what he can to "keep them on board."

-- Regarding the ongoing review of Afghanistan policy, Tolgfors asked that ISAF contributors be involved. "Please do not exclude your partners," he said.

End Summary.

Security Declines Mean More Troops, More Patrols

¶2. (C) Noting he had returned from Afghanistan less than two weeks ago, Tolgfors said the security situation in Sweden's PRT was good during the presidential elections, with greater than 50% voter turnout and all 136 polling centers operating without any security problems. But overall, security was declining. Tolgfors noted a "balloon effect" of increased pressure against insurgent forces in the South pushing "pockets of Taliban" northward into Sweden's PRT. In response, Sweden is now actively patrolling areas "where we know we don't have full control because we don't want the others to get control there." Sweden will increase its troop presence in Afghanistan from the current 440 to 500 by the end of this year, he said. "Not just the numbers will increase but also their capacity, with more heavy equipment and an additional OMLT," he added. The military was having no problem recruiting volunteers for international missions, and a recent recruiting drive for next year's Afghanistan deployment brought in 15 times more applicants than available spots.

Military Pushing for More Development Aid

¶3. (C) On the development side, Swedish aid in multilateral

and bilateral channels will reach nearly \$170 million U.S. dollars over the next three years (Ref A). Sweden's armed forces had taken the lead in the Swedish interagency in pushing for a "comprehensive approach" to Afghanistan with Chief of the General Staff Sverker Goransson pushing for more resources to go to civilian aid agencies. Tolgfors noted that he was not speaking too much publicly about the need for more civilian aid himself because he did not want to highlight the imbalance between military and civilian commitments. Rebalancing could occur in one of two ways he noted, "and we don't want to see them drop troops but rather increase the civilian presence."

¶14. (C) Tolgfors commented that Sweden and other ISAF members had done a good job helping the Afghan National Army but had done a poor job with respect to the Afghan National Police. Sweden currently has six police in Afghanistan but is planning to increase that number by the end of the year (Ref B). "We have the ambition to double our support to the EUPOL Mission," he said, but noted two problems: the political issue that governments find it hard to justify publicly removing police from their own streets, and the practical problem that -- unlike with soldiers -- there is no tradition of sending police on international deployments.

Political Support for Afghan Deployments

¶15. (C) Asked about Swedish public support for the Afghanistan mission, Tolgfors said that 68% of voters who back the four-party ruling coalition government are in favor of the Swedish military presence in Afghanistan, but the corresponding figure for supporters of the largest opposition

party, the Social Democrats (SDP), is 33%. To date the SDP leadership has been in favor of the Afghanistan deployments, which were initiated under the previous SDP government. Tolgfors said he was committed to be fully open with the SDP on the Afghanistan mission because he wanted to "keep them on board." He noted that the SDP foreign policy spokesman Urban Ahlin had met with him for an extensive briefing the week before. Asked about reports that the Greens, coalition partners of the SDP, had recently begun to change their views on the continued military presence in Afghanistan, Tolgfors said that they were under pressure and were now talking only about the need for a withdrawal plan.

"Don't Exclude Your Partners" on Afghanistan Review

¶16. (C) Turning to the COMISAF initial assessment and the ongoing U.S. strategic review of Afghanistan, Tolgfors stated, "when it comes to an evaluation of what is being done, please do not exclude your partners." He noted "real concern" among the EU Member States during the September 28-29 informal EU Defense Ministerial in Goteborg, adding that "there are 28 NATO members but 42 nations contributing to the military mission in Afghanistan, and so the ISAF format is essential for consultations and evaluations." It is important that the international community not discuss an end date for ISAF's presence in Afghanistan or discuss how many casualties it can accept before pulling out, Tolgfors said. Rather, it is important to make clear that ISAF will stay until the mission is done. As with the Balkans, it is essential that we maintain an "in together, out together" public posture with respect to Afghanistan, Tolgfors stated.

Comment

¶17. (C) The governing coalition has a seven-seat majority in the 349-seat Parliament and could in theory force through legislation this fall extending the Swedish deployment through 2010. However, no post-War Swedish government has ever before sent troops abroad without consensus among the main governing and opposition parties. So once again, the Government will need the opposition Social Democrats to support its annual Afghanistan bill.

